

HOW COMMUNICATION GADGETS AND SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIVITIES CAN INFLUENCE THE ATTITUDE OF LANGUAGE LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY AT BINUS UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

After the invention of PC and the internet, smart phones and tablet PC are the common gadgets that can be easily found among people in Indonesia. Besides its advantages, these instruments change the way users communicating to the others. Preliminary observation suggests that students who used IT or communication gadgets have developed a different attitude compared to those who are not. In writing for example, many young students today tend to write using the keyboard rather than handwriting. From the writer's point of view, it is believed that the characteristic of these communication gadgets has influenced the way most young teenagers act, talk, and behave. The result of analysis of this paper has provided a clearer picture on the effect of certain technology toward the behavior of some students and teachers at BINUS University. The data gathered through qualitative observation from English Department students and English teachers at BINUS University shows that the presence of communication gadgets and social networking activities has changed the attitude especially concerning to learning preference.

Keywords: communication gadgets, social networking, student attitudes, language learners.

ABSTRAK

Setelah ditemukan PC dan internet, smart phone dan gadgets juga banyak dipakai oleh orang Indonesia. Di samping keuntungan, alat ini juga mengubah cara berkomunikasi dengan orang lain. Studi awal menemukan bahwa mahasiswa yang menggunakan IT atau gadget mempunyai sikap berkomunikasi yang berbeda dibandingkan dengan yang tidak menggunakan. Misalnya, di dalam menulis, mahasiswa lebih terbiasa mengetik dari pada menulis tangan. Sifat berkomunikasi dengan memakai gadget telah mempengaruhi kebanyakan mahasiswa dalam bertindak, berbicara, dan berperilaku. Hasil analisis menunjukkan gambaran nyata tentang efek teknologi tertentu terhadap perilaku beberapa mahasiswa dan dosen di Universitas Bina Nusantara. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan metode kualitatif dari mahasiswa dan dosen di Jurusan Sastra Inggris. Disimpulkan, bahwa kehadiran gadget dan kegiatan jejaring sosial telah mengubah sikap, terutama yang terkait dengan pilihan cara pembelajaran yang mereka sukai.

Kata kunci: komunikasi gadget, jejaring sosial, sikap mahasiswa, pemelajar bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Recently, more people in Indonesia believed that having personal gadget such as Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), smart phone, or tablet computer that is connected to the internet are some things that is integrated in their life. Quorus Research in 2011 about Cell Phones consumer attitudes had stated that based on the survey one out of ten people have smartphone or at least cell phone (Quorus Consulting Group, 2012). Indonesia also experienced a tremendous growth in cell phone ownership and utilization. In February 2011, AC Nielsen, an international research and polling agent, reported that the number of cell phone users in Indonesia has tripled in the last five years, which makes Indonesia as one of the biggest cell phones users in the world (Nielsenwire, 2011).

Still according to Nielsen, 70 percent of Indonesians are having mobile phone connection. Most of them are users aged of 10-14 years old, and the number of these group has increased more than five times during the five year period. The most favorite features are the instant messaging or chatting over voice calls and texting (Nielsenwire, 2011).

This high level of consumerism of handheld gadgets in Indonesia is partly because of the economy growth, and due to the open policy of information access. Based on Nielsen report about smartphone surging in Southeast Asia, the smartphones tendencies in Southeast Asia, many of these young adults has already been targeted as the new market. This condition creates a new phenomenon where many of these youths use the technology (Nielsenwire, 2011).

The education institution is also reacted by integrating IT through many ways such as online learning during the teaching-learning activities. Many developing countries such as the Southeast Asian countries has started to educate their teachers to understand about communication technology. According to UNESCO report entitled: *ICT in Teacher Education: Case Studies from the Asia-Pacific Region*, since 2007 the UNESCO has been working to upgrade teachers' competency in countries such as: Bhutan, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines and Malaysia. The upgrading activities includes working in the field of methodology of teaching using ICT and building connections between schools and industries in creating information network (UNESCO, 2007). This indicates that the future of education in Asia will rely on the Information Communication Technology.

The penetration of ICT in BINUS University Jakarta is obvious. Most of the time, the writer witnessed almost all students are attached with their communication gadgets. Since most of these gadgets use English as its instruction, now English now is used as everyday jargon or conversation. Although its development is not as fast as in other countries such as India and Singapore where English is functioned as business language, English in Indonesia is now moving to be a social language.

This research is crucial since it will portray the difference of perception among students toward ICT instruments or gadgets. Eck, et.al (2005) conducted research about how gender and ethnic group reacted differently towards certain communication technologies (Eck, Heemsker, & Volman, 2005). With the same analogy, the researcher believed that students at BINUS University have unique characteristics, since they are highly exposed with foreign language (English) and communication technology. As a person who are exposed to technology, they will create a new kind of individual who is independent and self – driven person. And with the language skills they have, they are expected to be able to interact in a larger social community. These two different characteristics will then develop a new kind of learners that the researcher tries to reveal through this paper.

Literature Review

The flexibility of teaching-learning method has been long discussed by many researchers. Menakshi Verma from India underlined the correlation between student's attitude and its impact of learning a language. He stresses the importance of the customized learning activities to ensure the satisfactory result of teaching-learning process (Verma, n.d.). Stepp-Greany also strengthened Verma's notion by focusing the role of the teacher and the surrounding cultural condition during the presence of a communication technology instrument during the teaching learning process (Stepp-Greany, 2002).

These two researches support the idea that any teaching – learning methods can be applied inside or outside classroom activities. Shih and Gamon (2001) in *Web-based learning: Relationships among student motivation, attitude, learning styles, and achievement* also concluded that students, regardless of their different learning styles and backgrounds learned equally well in web-based courses (Shih & Gamon, 2001). The methods here only mention about the web based learning which commonly known as e-learning. However, with the presence of new technology where information can be easily accessed in the palm of our hand, the learning instruments become very personal, and can potentially influence the attitude of the learners.

A study about consumer behavior toward smartphone was conducted in Malaysia by Sabudin and Osman in the early 2011. The research shows that there male users have higher acceptance in various contents such as games, application software (apps) e-mail and internet browsing. On the other hand, female users have higher tendency on personalizing their gadgets through purchasing ringtones and wallpapers (Sabudin , Osman, & Osman, 2011).

In educational context, Woodcock (2012) in his paper entitled: *Considering the Smartphone Learner: An Investigation into Student Interest in the Use of Personal Technology to Enhance their Learning* (Woodcock, Middleton, & Nortcliffe, 2012) stated that most students appreciate the benefits of using smartphones for their study. However, most of them do not know how it can help them. This study explains some of the reasons why young teenagers mostly used their smartphones for social networking or chatting rather than using it for information search engine or as an e-book reader.

There is evidence of growing interest in the use of ICT gadgets such as smartphones in higher education leading to new pedagogical practices. Cochrane and Bateman in Woodstock (2012), correlate the user-centered and social value of Web 2.0 technologies to education with the “smartphone's capacity to facilitate student-centered social constructivist pedagogies” (Woodcock, Middleton, & Nortcliffe, 2012). Student's interest in ICT innovation is unsurprisingly high, although most of the times students needed to be encouraged to think beyond their expectations of a traditional learning environment (Middleton and Nortcliffe, 2009).

The action toward implementing ICT inside the classroom was proposed in 2009 during the National Student Forum Annual Report, which challenged “universities and lecturers to review their teaching methods... to assess whether they are sufficiently taking advantage of new technologies.” This report shows a diversity of opinions in relation to e-learning, though it was clear about the need of careful selections and thought about the appropriate use of technology. In the report it is reported that based on the online survey there are split of opinion whether mobile phones or PDAs should be used to assist learning (Woodcock, Middleton, & Nortcliffe, 2012).

METHODS

In order to collect data to represent the whole population from the samples, a questionnaire survey is adopted to collect primary data. Then, the data collected is analyzed using appropriate non-parametric analysis method and is presented in presentation format. The data used in this study were collected through observation and face-to-face survey. The data was collected at the BINUS University area. Students from the English Department are specifically selected to capture how the communication gadgets can influence the attitude and their language production.

The researcher has successfully gathered 15 usable data from students and 10 teachers. Since the size of the data is quite small, this research can only be considered as case study that applied to BINUS University. The data was gathered from students and teachers who are actively using IT gadgets in the daily and teaching-learning process. For this research, The IT gadgets are limited to: *Blackberry* (with the *Blackberry Messenger* turned on), Smartphone that connects to the Internet and tablet PC such as Apple iPad or Android tablet PC, which also have internet connection. The reasons for choosing this gadget are due to its popularity, functions, and features.

The objective of the survey is to find out: (1) what motivates users of using the handheld gadget; (2) frequency of using it; (3) what feature is mostly used, which one is never used; (4) the level of dependency; (5) their perception about the usage of those gadgets for their study.

The respondents are selected randomly between 16-50 years old. The students are taken from undergraduate level from English Department BINUS University. They are from the 6th semester and selected based on how long have used the gadgets for quite significant amount of time as compared to the first year students. The teachers are also from the English department, which is selected based on the familiarity of using the gadgets for their activities and the usage of the gadgets during academic activities.

DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

Table 1 shows demographic profile of the respondents. The data show that most users of communication gadgets such smartphones and tablet PC are mostly young adult. This result is consistent with previous studies from Nielsen which stated that majority of smart phone users are teenagers and younger adults (Nielsen Report, 2011).

Table 1 Demographic profile of the respondents

Item	Amount	Percentage
Gender		
Male	10	40
Female	15	60
Age		
16-20	5	20
17-26	10	40
27-36	4	16
47-56	6	0
More than 57	0	0

The following table summarizes the trend among the respondents on the utilization of software applications. From the data, the most utilized application software is music player, calendar, picture viewer, and video player.

GPS, dictionary, and games are very popular for the young adult but not among the teachers who are above 30 years old of age. This is in parallel with what Nielsen wire has already reported in that since 2010 the social networking and the internet messenger are on the top priority for the young adult in Asia (Social Media Dominates Asia Pacific Internet Usage, 2010).

Table 2 Preference of using application in their gadgets

Software application	Percentages
Music Player	96
Calendar	48
Picture Viewer	72
Video Player	72
GPS	48
Dictionary	60
Games	60
File	60
Themes	16
Weather	16
News	72
E books	40
Social networking	72
Internet messenger (including Blackberry Messenger)	93
Others	12

Analysis

During the informal interview, it was identified that all students never use their gadgets for direct personal communication in English. They tend to use informal language. If they have to use English, they will write it by texting. Unsurprisingly, both teachers and students never turned on the text prediction feature such as XT-9 or *Suretype* in Blackberry to help them to write faster and free from spelling errors. They said that they are not familiar with the feature.

From the questionnaire, all of the students (fifteen students) use the handheld gadgets for chatting with their peers. The gadgets were mostly used for internet messaging, updating *Facebook* status, twitter and sending short text messages (SMS). They mostly spend about one hundred thousand Rupiahs per month just for the mobile connection fee. This attitude was captured in a survey conducted by iReach in September 2011. The survey showed that there is a growing tendency for the young male adults to use smartphone for their conversation among their peers. They are more likely downloaded application software (apps) that could lead to their enhancement of social activities (iReach Omnibus Survey, 2011)

Students also admit that they are connected to the social networking almost in a real-time manner. When they were asked about the advantages of the gadgets for their study, most of them said that they use it (especially the Blackberry) for its dictionary feature. Although dictionary is a powerful tools for English Department students, it seems that students are not aware about the potentials of this tool.

Although most of the respondents aware that their gadgets can be used to surf the Internet, not everyone use this feature. The adult respondents say that they do not turn their internet power on because they do not want to spend money just for the internet. On the contrary, the young adults turn their internet gadgets on because they need it for their social activities. This attitude is in line with the recent findings about Asian young adults who spend most of their times online.

Table 3 Preferences of Purchasing for Internet Service Plan

Options (in Rupiahs)	Percentage	Note
80.000 – 100.000	72	Mostly from the age group of 16-26 years old
70.000 – 80.000	8	
50.000 – 70.000	20	Mostly from the age group of 47-56 years old

The result correlates with Bødker report in 2011, that social value is one among the most determined factor for using communication gadget nowadays. The social value of owning a communication gadget such as smartphone will determine user's position in the society. It can act as a social ice - breaker and interaction, and to form new relationships (Bødker, Gimpel, & Hedman, 2011).

Communication Gadgets in Education

In terms of using the traditional cellphone feature, all students admit that they ever send short text messaging to their lecturers. Furthermore, they said that they prefer to send messages when they want to discuss about schedule, assignments or anything related to their study rather than to meet in person because of its rapid response and convenience. When they were asked about the time they send the text, most of them said that they send it anytime they remember. Four respondents even said that they ever sending text messages in the evening after working hours. And when they were asked about the language they use, they admitted that sometimes they are using English, but not sure about the appropriateness of the expression used.

On the other hand, teachers use the gadgets mostly for supporting their job and routine activities such as checking e-mails, sending text messages and browsing for information in the internet. They use Blackberry Messenger to maintain their relationship with colleagues and family. All of them said that they turn off their gadgets after working hours and turn it on again in the next day.

When teachers were asked about students sending them text messages, all of them said that they are welcome to be contacted by them. They said that messaging makes their work efficient. With Jakarta heavy traffic, they said that communicating through internet messenger or text messaging can enable them to make appointment or arrange schedule before they discuss important material in the classroom. However, apart from the effective function of the handheld instruments, eighty percent (8 teachers) prefer not to discuss urgent matter through the internet or messaging. When these respondents were asked about the effect of the handheld gadgets, all of them agree that the gadget should never be used in the classroom. They said that it only creates nothing but interference in the classroom atmosphere.

On the contrary, most students are looking forward to having serious conversation with their teacher through online. They said that it would be better if the discussion can be conducted through online discussion. It saves their time and also they feel that it has less personal pressure rather than meeting with him or her in person.

The effect of being exposed by handheld gadgets is quite obvious. A teacher who teaches writing mentioned that compared to five years ago, he had a problem with students' work. He said that now he had difficulties in reading student's handwriting, which is worsened each year. He suspects that this is due to the long habit of typing instead of writing.

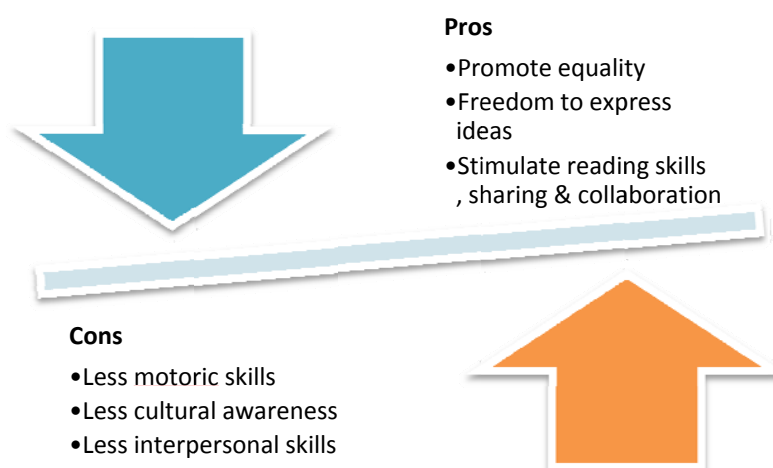


Figure 1

In contrast, these IT gadgets especially Tablet PC gives positive effects in reading skills. A teacher who teaches reading find that student nowadays read faster and more efficient than himself. He said "*students now read faster than few years ago, but most of them miss the detailed matter.*" By saying this, he suggests that the new habit of scrolling information can give positive effect for readers. The new habit of scrolling through web pages in the internet had made student unconsciously trained to read from up-down direction rather than from left to right direction. Although this is quite advantageous for learners, the teacher also warned that this skill is only good for the skimming and scanning reading. It is not suitable for reading for detail information. So, it is a job for teachers to be aware about this phenomenon.

Surprisingly, only few of students at BINUS University uses their IT gadgets for e book reader. The unpopularity of e book readers has already been predicted by Olswang Survey in 2009. In 2009, Olswang conducted a survey about the future of e book readers and smartphones that can be used for e-book. From the survey, it was revealed that users were mostly complained due to the screen and the size of the text in the smart phones (Olswang Convergence Survey 2009, 2009). In this research, however, it was revealed that the usage of smartphones for E book reader is not popular because the unfamiliarity of users in using the feature. Most students who were being interviewed admitted that they prefer to have a printed book instead of the digital version. This shows that most students in Indonesia still need to adapt more on the usage of communication gadgets as e reader.

Communication Gadget for Learning English

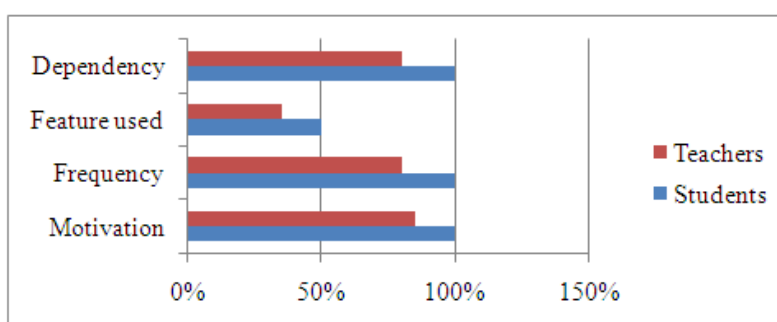
A research about relation between mastering computers and English has been conducted in 2011. Alim and Astuti (2011) has conducted a research in a high school in Indonesia that reveals a positive correlation between familiarity in operating computer and English (Alim & Astuti, 2011). Since communication gadget can be treated as a miniature of a personal computer, it can be assumed that mastery in operating and utilizing the features in communication gadgets such as smartphones can lead into a better understanding of English language.

With the previously conducted research as mentioned above, it is clearly seen that the future of education will also lie on the mastery of utilizing information and communication instruments. In 2008, The Economist reported that the future of education will mostly be occupied by online learning. It is predicted that in the future the education system will heavily depend on many external factors such as the internet and personal gadgets (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008). This phenomenon can be seen today where many lectures are conducted in both synchronous and asynchronous methods in the form of digital blackboard, remote learning and video conferencing.

After analyzing the data presented in this research it can be assumed that users are motivated to use gadgets because of their own needs of social interaction. On the other hand, the impact of using this communication gadget is clearly seen in the change of attitude towards learning and communicating with others.

In connection to cross cultural understanding, the presence of online video database which can be accommodated through communication gadget such as *Youtube*, can provide a significant contribution for learners to understand other culture. However, the personal value of many unwritten lessons such as about politeness and do's and don'ts, which was commonly learned through social interaction, cannot be completely observed through videos. A teacher said that he ever had several email from students that consistently misplace the usage of the Indonesian pronoun of *Aku* and *Saya*. He suspected that this inappropriateness is partly contributed by the lack of understanding of some basic cultural rules of a language.

Table 4 Reflection on The Usage of Communication Gadgets
Among Students and Teachers of Binus University



CONCLUSION

Apart from its positive effect in by making users become self-motivated to learn and use English, the impact of these gadgets has brought a change in the attitude of the users. The writer has observed that English learners at BINUS University who are aware and use the internet or cellular technology, tend to have less social personal interaction especially with people outside their peers. The habit of texting by sending Short messages (SMS), or sending file through email make them less skillful in communicating in proper context.

The research strongly indicates that most students have not made strong connections for themselves between their personal communication technology, their needs as learners and the way they learn. However, the study also demonstrates great interest and openness to the potential: the students quickly began to understand and consider the opportunity once the suggestion had been made.

In summary, communication gadgets such as Smartphone can be a useful resource for students to practice and use their integrated target language skills and to communicate with others outside the classroom. However, this study also indicates that the usage of this instrument could potentially change the attitude of its users. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to be aware of the dynamic of language learning and technology. Technology can either assist or hinder the language learning activities. It is the job of a teacher to put it in harmony.

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